

20th/11/99 The Island

Eppawala phosphate project

The public have been informed, through the columns of the Daily News, that the government has decided to rescind the preliminary agreement with the foreign companies on the mining of the phosphate deposit at Eppawala by them. According to the same report, this decision had been taken in response to the strong opposition to the project expressed by the left parties, the LSSP in particular. The statement in the Daily News is attributed to Mr. Batty Weerakoon.

Mr. Weerakoon's opposition to the project, as a private citizen and as Minister

for Science and Technology, is well known. It is also known that Minister Weerakoon has become of late the principal defender of the President who happens to be in dire straits on many fronts.

Furthermore, he is not the Minister of Industries under whom the Mines Bureau and Lanka Phosphates function. A statement made by Mr. Weerakoon therefore carries little weight.

It is therefore incumbent on the government to issue a formal, official statement on a matter of such grave importance to the future of the country.

That statement must be issued by the

parties who are directly accountable for giving the go-ahead for this project or for abandoning it. They are (i) the Board of Investment; (ii) the Ministry of Industries, and (iii) the President. In the case of the President it should be in her present official capacity as President and not in her capacity as a Presidential Candidate.

This question should be followed upon and an official statement obtained from the authorities who are competent to make one.

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